

[Transcript] True Sunlight / MMP #89: The 'Godfather' of S.C.'s Prisons Gets Out Early and the Truth about the "Stephen Smith Theories"

I don't know how the South Carolina justice system continues to disappoint and disturb us.

But this week, we stumbled across yet another shocking case with all of the same ingredients that we have been talking about for 89 episodes, money, power, crime, corruption, and two systems of justice in South Carolina.

My name is Mandy Matney.

I have been a reporter in South Carolina for more than seven years now.

This is the Murdoch Murders podcast produced by my husband David Moses and written with journalist Liz Farrell.

So just a year ago, we introduced you to the Bowen Turner case.

The South Carolina man accused of raping three girls in three different counties between 2018 and 2019.

One of those girls, Dallas Stoller, died from a self-inflicted wound after her rape.

In a year ago this month, Bowen Turner, with the help of his state senator attorney Brad Heddo, was given a sweetheart deal of just five years probation, even after he violated his court-ordered ankle monitor more than 60 times.

The case was egregious and worth every ounce of energy that we put into it, even if it wasn't at all related to the Murdochs.

After we published our episode last April, the story went viral and Bowen Turner's name and face were in headlines all over the world.

And because the world was watching, Bowen Turner was finally held accountable in May of 2022.

Just after that episode was published, Bowen violated his probation and was charged with public disorderly conduct.

He was sentenced to 10 to 14 months in prison and will have to register as a sex offender when he's released.

He is currently at Kirkland Correctional Facility, where Alec Murdoch was housed before he was moved to an undisclosed location, which turned out to be McCormick Prison about two hours from Hampton County.

Bowen Turner could get out in the next few months, and we intend to watch his case closely.

All of that said, the Bowen Turner case reminded us just how essential our work on this podcast is, beyond the Murdoch case.

And oddly enough, as we were considering topics for this week's episode, something again happened that enraged our whole team.

As South Carolina residents dedicated to exposing a tainted justice system, we feel it is necessary to dedicate a good portion of today's show to a different case, which does have some loose ties to Carmen Mullen.

And it is yet another story that serves as a very clear example as to exactly why the way we elect our judges in this state contributes to a corrupt system.

This story has all the same problematic ingredients that we have talked about time and time again, lawmaking lawyers cutting backroom deals with judges who are free to do as they please with zero accountability, and money providing an entrance to a higher tier of justice not available to the rest of us, all at the expense of public safety.

Again, Alec Murdoch was not a bad egg of a good system.

[Transcript] True Sunlight / MMP #89: The 'Godfather' of S.C.'s Prisons Gets Out Early and the Truth about the "Stephen Smith Theories"

He was the product of a bad system that should have stopped him a long time ago, and we have to keep screaming about this until those in power do something about it.

So, what happened?

On Monday, Solicitor David Pascoe, one of the only public officials and attorneys in this state who has been brave enough to speak out against corruption and question Judge Carmen Mullen's ethics, he got an unexpected phone call from an investigator who he hadn't spoken with in a long time.

Pascoe told us that he picked up the phone and joked, what crime do you need me to solve now?

And the investigator said, the crime I need you to solve is why Dorad Price is back out on the streets.

Pascoe, a prosecutor with decades of experience, remembered Price well, not only because he is the one who helped put Price behind bars for murder in 2003, but because, just 36 hours before this phone call, Pascoe was at an event where someone asked him if he's ever worried about people who he put in prison coming back to get revenge.

Weirdly enough, Pascoe said that he responded out of all of the people who I put in prison, there is only one I've had a second thought about.

And that is Dorad Price.

So who is Dorad Price?

In December 2003, Price was sentenced to 35 years in prison for the 2002 murder of Carl Smalls Jr.

A college football player has started out at the University of South Carolina and then went on to play at the University of North Carolina.

Price was a well-known member of the Bloods Gang in Columbia, according to court documents, news reports at the time, and current sources.

At the time, Price denied his involvement with the gang.

And again, Price was sentenced to 35 years for the murder of Carl Smalls Jr., 35 years without parole.

Meaning he was set to be released in 2038, which is more than 15 years away.

South Carolina law is very simple.

If you are convicted of murder, you must be sentenced to a minimum of 30 years.

According to the law, no amount of good behavior or exchange of information can get a defendant out of that.

Pascoe told us that he couldn't believe it when he heard that Price was out.

This convicted killer, whom Pascoe considered to be very dangerous, was just suddenly free as a bird with no explanation whatsoever.

So what did Pascoe do?

He started making phone calls.

He found out that the judge who signed the order that released Price was Judge Casey Manning.

Pascoe said that right around the time when Manning retired, on December 31, 2022, and also around the time the Governor Henry McMaster rewarded Manning with the state's highest honor, the Order of the Palmetto, Judge Casey Manning quietly signed a sealed order that

[Transcript] True Sunlight / MMP #89: The 'Godfather' of S.C.'s Prisons Gets Out Early and the Truth about the "Stephen Smith Theories"

allowed for the release of convicted killer Gerard Price.

And that order was executed last month.

On March 15, 2023, as South Carolina law enforcement and prosecutors were still taking a well-deserved victory lap from Ellick Murdoch's conviction, Gerard Price was quietly released from prison.

A full 11 years before he served the minimum sentence of any convicted murderer, and nearly 16 years before he served his full 35 years sentence.

Pascoe told us on March 15, Carl Small's family received a phone call from a woman at the Department of Corrections.

She said she was calling the victim's family out of courtesy and respect.

She warned them that their son's killer was going to get released that day.

She said that she wanted them to hear it from a real voice and not the automated phone call they were due to receive.

Soon after that call, the Smalls received the gut-wrenching robo-call from the Department of Corrections, telling them their son's murder was being released that day from prison in New Mexico where he was being held for his South Carolina charges.

They couldn't believe it.

From everything that we have found so far, there was no hearing.

The victim's family didn't even get an explanation as to how and why this could be happening.

And those involved like Pascoe didn't even get a warning that this was happening.

And why is that?

Because the Department of Corrections could not explain it.

The order was sealed, meaning the people who were paid to manage our prison system didn't even have access to this information.

Only a judge, a convicted murderer, and the convicted murderer's attorney appear to have known the how and the why.

So essentially, South Carolina officials, not just officials, but elected officials who are working for us, the taxpayers, and the voters, somehow were able to orchestrate the release of a dangerous convicted killer last month by apparently going outside of the normal process of how things are supposed to work.

How does that happen?

I feel like I'm screaming the same things that I was screaming a year ago, when Bowen Turner's rape charges were suddenly dropped and the victims were given very little say or warning.

When a judge who rarely handled cases in Bowens County suddenly popped up on the schedule, willing to approve the shockingly light sentence.

And we know how that happened.

Well, turns out, like Bowen Turner, Gerard Price also had the luxury of being represented by a powerful state lawmaker, Minority House Leader Representative Todd Rutherford, who has been a lawyer and a lawmaker in this state for decades.

Remember, South Carolina is one of two states in the U.S. where the legislator appoints its judges.

And a lot of our lawmakers also happen to be powerful defense attorneys, like Senator

[Transcript] True Sunlight / MMP #89: The 'Godfather' of S.C.'s Prisons Gets Out Early and the Truth about the "Stephen Smith Theories"

Dick Harputlian, Ellic Murdoch's attorney, and Bowen Turner's attorney, Senator Brad Huddo.

Todd Rutherford, a longtime criminal defense attorney who once represented the corrections officer who had sex with a convicted killer, Susan Smith, while she was in prison, and I will share that article for MMP premium members, is not only a powerful lawmaker, but he has served on a judiciary committee, the committee specifically tasked with electing and vetting judges.

Rutherford is an elected official who owes a duty to the public.

We understand that criminal defense attorneys have a job to do and must fight for their clients in the best way that they can.

But taking part in a secret deal that appears to be illegal in the name of allowing a convicted killer to walk free before he has served his time, that is not doing a job.

That is abusing power.

We reached out to Rutherford on Wednesday morning to give him the opportunity to comment on this story.

As of late Wednesday afternoon, we had not heard anything.

To find out the how and the why of this, we called around and spoke to a number of sources.

So like we said, representative Rutherford is Price's attorney.

The question is how?

Who is paying representative Rutherford to represent Price?

Obviously we don't know what that fee agreement looked like, but from what we've been told, Gerard Price has been considered to be the godfather of the Bloods and has been allegedly running South Carolina's prisons.

We don't mean running the prisons as in securing contracts for food and minding the budget.

We mean running them as in being at the very top of whatever Lord of the Flies power structure forms when you put hundreds of men who have committed egregious crimes under the same roof. From what we've been told and from archival news reports, a lot goes on behind South Carolina bars.

And there's a lot of money being made by prisoners.

A lot, apparently.

You heard that right.

Money being made.

A lot of it.

By prisoners.

This from what we are being told is why Gerard Price found himself getting sent to New Mexico even though his crime was committed in South Carolina and even though his crime was a violation of state law.

And there was a little matter of him allegedly getting caught ordering the deaths of two different wardens.

Price was sent to New Mexico along with other gang members who represent the worst of the worst to get him away from his place of business and because of the seriousness of the accusations made against him.

[Transcript] True Sunlight / MMP #89: The 'Godfather' of S.C.'s Prisons Gets Out Early and the Truth about the "Stephen Smith Theories"

In 2003, after Price was found guilty, it was Judge Reggie Lloyd who sentenced him. After serving as a circuit court judge, Attorney Reggie Lloyd then went on to become the director of SLED.

Meaning Price wasn't just sentenced by a judge, he was sentenced by someone who would become the number one law enforcement officer in the state of South Carolina.

And yet here we are, good ol' boys, good ol' boying because up until recently anyway, they could good ol' boy as much as they wanted without anyone getting in their way.

We reached out to Reggie Lloyd on Tuesday evening to see if he wanted to comment on Price's release.

As of late Wednesday afternoon, we had not heard anything back from him.

So back to the Godfather thing.

I asked one of our sources whether they'd ever seen the show The Wire because what we were learning about Price sounded awfully familiar.

It sounded like Price might be South Carolina's version of Avon Barksdale.

That source agreed with me.

The Wire is one of those shows that cops, particularly those in big cities, say is very accurate.

It was written and created by a former police reporter and a former homicide investigator. The series depicts gangs as basically illicit unregulated businesses that specialize in sales.

For lack of better terms, Avon Barksdale was the CEO of West Baltimore's heroin market.

He had a lot of money and he held a lot of power, and he was able to hire great attorneys.

Oh, and he suddenly got released from prison.

So to summarize, we have a situation in which a convicted killer was released early, possibly illegally, under a sealed order signed by a retiring judge who is a former University of South Carolina sports hero and is now listed among the most important and most well-regarded citizens of this state on his very last day on the bench.

The convicted killer, who held so much influence in our state's prison system that he was shipped off to a prison two time zones away, is represented by a state lawmaker.

No hearing was held.

The Department of Corrections doesn't even know why he was released.

The victims were told mere moments before the release and had a kind person not stepped in would have been informed by a robo-call.

No assessment seems to have been done of the convicted killer's prison record, which wasn't good.

And from what our sources tell us, Price's release had nothing to do with an exchange of information.

Yet, this was apparently what was offered to Judge Manning as the reason for the release, meaning even though Price did give authorities information about a prisoner escaping Libra Correctional Institution in Ridgeville, apparently before the Department of Corrections even knew about this escape, because Price apparently knew this from New Mexico.

This exchange of information was considered useless and was never actually vetted or corroborated according to our sources.

[Transcript] True Sunlight / MMP #89: The 'Godfather' of S.C.'s Prisons Gets Out Early and the Truth about the "Stephen Smith Theories"

One source told us that some people believe that Price might have orchestrated this prisoner's escape with the plan to use that information to leverage his own early release.

And here's the thing.

Even if Judge Manning approved this early release based on a bad understanding of what happened, it still happened outside of the normal process.

Price was not eligible for release, plain and simple.

The law prohibits him from getting credit for exchanging information even if that information were usable.

And given his alleged attempts to have two wardens killed, and given the crime that put him behind bars in the first place, why would anyone think this would be okay?

Oh right, they didn't think it was okay.

You know how we know this?

Because the judge sealed his order and allowed for this to happen without the proper steps being taken.

They did this in the dark.

So, as we were recording this podcast, solicitor Byron Gibson released a statement in an attempt to justify his involvement in Price's release.

Gibson essentially said that he believes that the statute allows for a sentencing reduction in exchange for information.

But to be clear, that is his interpretation of the law, and we're not sure if that would hold up in court at all.

Gibson essentially placed blame on Judge Manning, saying that Manning filed the order before he could ask for a hearing and follow protocol.

Because of this, Gibson said in his statement that he's now asking the court to reopen the case for an open hearing to allow victims to speak.

Which is their South Carolina constitutional right as victims, by the way.

But isn't that a little too late?

The victims didn't get their say before he was released.

The cat is out of the bag.

And why wasn't he concerned about this earlier?

Why is he just now asking for a hearing?

Why does it take so many angry people and a media firestorm for a public official to address this?

Price was released from New Mexico, apparently.

We aren't even sure.

His SEDC record literally says, release location unknown.

Which brings me to my next concern.

And perhaps the worst part of all of this, MMP researcher Callie Lyons called the South Carolina office a probation, parole, and pardon services this week.

And officials said that they do not have price set up for any sort of monitoring.

They even double checked with different spellings of his name.

And they confirmed that Rod Price was not released to the department for supervision.

AKA SE Public Officials just let a convicted killer out of prison, which appears to be

[Transcript] True Sunlight / MMP #89: The 'Godfather' of S.C.'s Prisons Gets Out Early and the Truth about the "Stephen Smith Theories"

illegal.

And then they have no way of at least checking in on his whereabouts.

Not noon Tuesday, Attorney General Allen Wilson filed a motion calling for the unsealing of this order, as well as other records related to Price's incarceration, so that he can assess the constitutionality of this clandestine action.

He asked the court to unseal the order within 24 hours.

According to Robert Kittle, who is the public information officer with the Attorney General's office, Fifth Circuit Solicitor Byron Gibson and Representative Rutherford have both agreed to the unsealing of the order, and Chief Justice Donald Beatty is expected to issue an order to make that official.

Kittle said that a hearing was scheduled for 4pm Thursday, because the Attorney General doesn't just want the order unsealed, he wants every record related to this case unsealed. It's unclear, though, whether there are other records related to Price under seal.

So it's possible this hearing will get cancelled.

We're told that Gibson and Representative Rutherford agreed to the unsealing because they had no other choice.

Oh, and get this, as of yesterday, the AG's office was in the middle of defending Judge Lloyd's sentencing of Price, because Price had filed a petition for post-conviction relief, meaning Price was released in the middle of asking to be released, which is further proof that no hearing seems to have been held, and further proof that this was intentionally done in the dark without even our number one prosecutor in this state knowing what was going down.

You understand how transgressive all this is, right?

There is no one we have talked to who has ever heard of something like this happening to this extreme of a degree.

And for whatever his reasoning, we are thankful that Allen Wilson at least is doing something about this egregious miscarriage of justice, which violates both the Victims Bill of Rights in South Carolina and our state's mandatory sentencing requirements.

We're telling you about this now because we are desperate for more public officials to stand up and fight corruption.

And unlike so many elected officials in this state, we actually care about public safety.

And we believe that there is safety in the sunlight.

And really, the most gut-wrenching and maddening thing about this, it's not just the Victims whose safety is threatened by Price's sudden release.

Price's release is unfortunately a problem for David Pascoe, who is one of the only South Carolina officials who has publicly fought corruption and called out Carmen Mullen.

He first told you about David Pascoe in episode 35, which was over a year ago.

And I want to talk about the incident where his name was brought up on this podcast because it's important, relevant, and it clearly explains the strange and ever-present Murdoch case connection to the story.

So remember back at the beginning of 2022, when Palmetto State Bank Vice President Chad Westendorf, the guy who apparently didn't know what the word fiduciary meant, was deposed by Eric Bland in the Satterfield case.

[Transcript] True Sunlight / MMP #89: The 'Godfather' of S.C.'s Prisons Gets Out Early and the Truth about the "Stephen Smith Theories"

In that deposition, Westendorf provided Eric Bland with play-by-play details as to what went down with the stolen \$4.3 million Satterfield settlement.

Westendorf said that Judge Carmen Mullen, who signed the agreement, missed a number of glaring red flags in the shoddy paperwork provided for the settlement, starting with the fact that Alec Murdoch's name, the defendant, was removed from the top of the paperwork, which never happens.

And more concerning, according to Westendorf, Corey Fleming, the plaintiff, asked Mullen to sign off the settlement while keeping Alec's name, who was the defendant, off of the books.

So another situation of a South Carolina judge failing to do their job, at the very least, in checking in on the basic facts before signing away on a document that greatly impacts a number of people's lives.

Mullen should have never signed the documents, period.

But if Corey Fleming really did ask her to keep the settlement that was already sketchy off of the public record, Mullen should have absolutely used her power right there to stop this massive thievery.

And that was in 2019.

If Mullen did her job back then, Mullen would have not only said no to signing the documents, but she would have reported Corey and Alec for inappropriate and seemingly unethical behavior. Judge Mullen could have stopped this four years ago.

Can we think about that for just a second?

Remember in 2021 how Alec Murdoch's world came crashing down after his buddy Chris Wilson agreed to an unorthodox fee payment of \$790,000.

Alec told him he was putting away money for the boat crash case instead of paying his law firm, like the fee agreement said, Alec told his buddy to pay him directly.

It makes me stop and wonder just how much destruction could have been avoided if Carmen Mullen did her job in 2019.

Mullen wears the robe.

She is amongst the highest ranking attorneys in our judicial system.

When we look back at every bad act by Alec Murdoch that seemed to be ignored, brushed off, and covered up by those around him, there is a pattern.

No one.

Even those who had more authority than him like Carmen Mullen seem to ever tell him the word no.

That's how Alec Murdoch became the lying, stealing, murderous monster he is.

We cannot ignore that.

So after West Indoor's deposition, Eric Bland and David Pascoe both reported Mullen's role in the Satterfield Heist to the South Carolina Supreme Court's Commission on Judicial Conduct.

In that grievance, filed in early 2022, which we still haven't heard an update on, was the second time Pascoe has reported Mullen.

In 2019, he reported her for allegedly improper actions in a big public corruption case that she presided over.

[Transcript] True Sunlight / MMP #89: The 'Godfather' of S.C.'s Prisons Gets Out Early and the Truth about the "Stephen Smith Theories"

It is very rare for a lawyer in South Carolina to file a grievance against a judge, and it is extremely rare and pretty much unheard of for one lawyer to file two grievances against a judge.

It's known as career suicide for a lawyer to stick their neck out and say that a judge is not doing their job, and Pascoe has done that twice.

And here's where it all collides.

As who, Carmen Mullen's well-known legal mentor is.

Judge Casey Manning, the judge who signed the extremely unorthodox and unethical order allowing Jarod Price to go free years before his 35-year sentence was served.

The judge who reportedly told Eric Bland to back down when he started voicing his concerns about Mullen when he discovered the Satterfield documents back in 2021.

And we will unpack all of that with Eric and next week's Kappa Justice episode.

But to be clear, we have not found any evidence of Carmen Mullen having anything to do with Price's release.

And Liz as Pascoe, whether he was worried about his safety now and whether he made anything of Judge Manning's connection to Carmen Mullen.

He told us that he didn't want to comment on either of those topics.

But just like we had to ask the solicitor those questions, we have to explain those connections because that's the problem with the system, right?

When you have a sitting judge who at the very least needs to be thoroughly and openly investigated still on the bench and from what the public can see is facing no consequences, it makes this question absolutely everything.

Like how is it that Price, a convicted killer who apparently has a vendetta against the only solicitor who reported Mullen twice, was let out of prison due to a secret order signed by Judge Casey Manning, Carmen Mullen's mentor?

I know, I know, it sounds like tinfoil hat stuff.

It sounds like what happens to people who go against the system in movies.

It sounds like the system is actually worse than we ever thought it was.

And that is a tough thing for me to say right now.

After exposing so much shocking information about the two systems of justice in the Murdoch and in the Bow and Turner cases, it feels like we are back to square one.

If this is a system where a dangerous killer can literally buy enough influence to get him out of prison more than a decade before he served the minimum time, then why are we pretending that this is a justice system?

It is chaos.

If Gerard Price can be quietly released from prison early, then what is stopping Ellick Murdoch from pulling strings and getting out early?

If Price has that power, why wouldn't Ellick?

He has a state senator for an attorney and he used to be a badge-carrying member of the 14th Circuit Solicitor's Office.

Talk about connections.

The thing is, before this, when someone was convicted of murder in South Carolina, solicitors could look the victim's family in their eyes and tell them without a shadow of a doubt

[Transcript] True Sunlight / MMP #89: The 'Godfather' of S.C.'s Prisons Gets Out Early and the Truth about the "Stephen Smith Theories"

that their loved one's killer would not be free for at least 30 years.

Because that is the law.

It should not be bent or broken in order to help the privileged and the powerful get special treatment.

When we start arbitrarily bending the law on very consequential crimes like murder, when there is no guarantee that the bad guy who was found guilty by a jury of his peers stays behind bars for the duration of his sentence, then here is what will happen.

No one will be safe.

Not the victim's families, not the investigators who brought the charges, not the witnesses who took the stand, not the prosecutors who did their jobs, not the jurors who found the defendant guilty, not the judges who sentenced the killer.

And you know what?

Not even the lawyers who take the cash are safe either.

Needless to say, we will be keeping an eye on this story and updating you on the latest. This is why we continue to say that the story about Ellick Murdoch is not just about the murders.

It's about a system that is so corrupt, the people in it don't even realize that what they're seeing is wrong.

And we will be right back.

Speaking of murders, on Cup of Justice this week we talked about the frustrations that arise with a cold case like Stephen Smith's.

Some of what we're about to talk about, we've talked about before, but it's important context to something else we want to discuss.

When it comes to families getting answers about their loved ones' murders, especially in cases where law enforcement has lost momentum, media coverage of the case is critical. And I say coverage, but what I really mean is the generating of public interest and the inherent pressure that usually comes along with that.

If we've learned anything over the past few years, especially the past two years, it's how much untapped power lies in the hands of the public.

The simple fact that people are watching and speaking out, the awareness that all corners of the back rooms are now flooded with sunlight, is what ends up moving these mountains. Just look at the Bow and Turner case and what happened when people started speaking out and paying attention, and look at how the price case is shaping up.

Also this is huge.

The very basic idea that people on the public payroll and otherwise can feel appreciated for the work they do and be rightfully celebrated for doing the right thing, the fair thing, especially when it means sticking their necks out, is what ends up moving even more mountains in the future.

All of this has been an exciting realization for us.

It's been an encouraging thing to see, and like we've said, we plan to harness that power for other dormant or stymied cases in the near future.

Media coverage is incredibly important.

It is the fuel.

[Transcript] True Sunlight / MMP #89: The 'Godfather' of S.C.'s Prisons Gets Out Early and the Truth about the "Stephen Smith Theories"

But there's also a flip side to any broad media coverage, and with that comes that frustration that I referenced a little bit ago and the frustrations that we discussed on Cup of Justice.

With a case like Stevens and with that media coverage and public interest that are so critically needed, a large door opens, and there is no bouncer at that door.

There is no guest list, no one is checking off names on a clipboard.

One can walk through that door and be heard, and that's great when it's great, and not so great when it's not so great.

This is all just to say that this come one, come all policy held by people with the microphones doesn't always help move those mountains.

Instead, it becomes like journalistic fracking.

They blow the top of the mountain off because it benefits them.

And who cares about the people who have to live on that mountain who are affected by the subsequent earthquakes?

This is not controllable, by the way, it's apparently how this works in certain realms and we're just now learning it from the inside out.

There's nothing we can do about it, but we can set the record straight as best we can.

In the Stephen Smith case, this has come in the form of so-called theories that are being shared and then validated by people who say, that sounds reasonable to me, that must be what happened.

Which fine, everyone has theories about every case that has ever existed in American criminal history.

And we're not talking about theories from the public, that's one thing.

We're talking about theories that are seemingly validated by the mere fact that they're being shared through news agencies.

Theories are important because they can lead to the truth.

But unless those theories are based on concrete knowledge and evidence, and unless the smaller picture that's formed is then reconciled against the concrete knowledge and evidence of the bigger picture and vice versa, then all that's being shared are self-important blabberings in our opinion.

It reminds me of the Amanda Knox documentary on Netflix that came out in 2016, and the arrogance of that prosecutor who royally screwed up that case.

Giuliani, Mignini, literally referred to himself as a modern-day Sherlock Holmes, and said that he based his findings, not on facts, but on his gut.

His gut.

Mignini based his theory about what happened to Meredith Kircher on his limited perception of Amanda Knox.

He regarded Amanda Knox as a mysteriously sexual being, and therefore, in his view, she must be a murderous vixen too.

It was sickening to watch his interviews.

If you haven't watched that doc yet, we highly recommend it.

So back to Steven.

One of the theories we've talked about a few times, including recently, is the Patrick

[Transcript] True Sunlight / MMP #89: The 'Godfather' of S.C.'s Prisons Gets Out Early and the Truth about the "Stephen Smith Theories"

Wilson and Sean Connolly theory.

We want to talk a little bit more about that today, because after several conversations we've had with sources over the past week and comments that we've seen online, we think it is important to lay it all out there about Steven's head wound and what it has always told us about that night.

Now, I want to make it clear, we are in no way referencing anything from the new autopsy report.

Instead, we're talking about what was knowable when the case file was released by the South Carolina Highway Patrol in 2021 and what remains unchanged.

We think that this will help some of you understand why we are frustrated when this Patrick Wilson and Sean Connolly theory gets tossed around.

The theory is that Sean, possibly with Patrick in his truck, hit Steven with his truck's side view mirror.

This theory is based on a few things.

The first is a half hazard third party so-called confession.

The second is that there are allegedly pictures of Sean's truck taken long after Steven's death that show a dent in his door, which we understand was from an encounter with a and he replaced the mirrors on his truck again long after Steven's crash.

Okay, so first, just to quickly reiterate the timeline here that we talked about recently, like we've told you before around Thanksgiving 2015, the Hampton Guardian newspaper did a profile of Sandy Smith and her fight for answers in Steven's case.

In that piece, she referred to people being fearful to talk to investigators because of the alleged influence of a locally powerful family.

She does not name any particular family, but if you're a, you know, quote, locally powerful family in Hampton County around the time this story comes out in November 2015, then I'd imagine your chinos went so far up into your body after you read that you had a pant leg coming out of each ear.

In that piece, Coroner Ernie Washington put on the record that Steven's death was caused by getting hit by a side view mirror on a truck of some kind.

As far as we know, this was the first time this theory was shared publicly.

Very shortly after that piece ran, a man named Daryl Williams intimated to at least two people that he'd been told who was involved in Steven's death by his girlfriend's son, Patrick Wilson.

Steven's case file states that Daryl was told by Randy Murdock, who is Alex's older brother, to share that information with investigators.

This is something that Daryl now denies according to what Steven Peterson told me in 2021.

Want to hear something crazy though?

The name Sean Connolly was not a name that was mentioned in those conversations that Daryl allegedly had in early December 2015 before reaching out to law enforcement.

Interesting, right?

Because on December 17th, 2015, three weeks after that Hampton Guardian piece ran, then Hampton police officer, Nick Ginn, was interviewed by South Carolina Highway Patrol investigator Michael Duncan, and he gave the information that was allegedly related to him by his stepfather, Daryl Williams.

[Transcript] True Sunlight / MMP #89: The 'Godfather' of S.C.'s Prisons Gets Out Early and the Truth about the "Stephen Smith Theories"

Now, Michael Duncan has since spoken out about Steven's case on national television to say that he does not believe Steven was killed in a hit and run, and has indicated that he believed there were some anomalies in this case.

But at the time, like we told you two weeks ago, he was interviewing not the guy with the first-hand knowledge of what Patrick Wilson allegedly said, but the guy with the third-hand knowledge of it.

And this guy with the third-hand knowledge said that Daryl said, that Patrick said, that Sean Connolly was drunk that night and hit something which he later discovered to be Steven.

It's times like this when you're reading the case file that you really wish the investigators included the mitigating factors, the why of this.

Why are you interviewing Nick Ginn and not Daryl Williams?

Anyways, Nick tells Duncan that he has spoken with a South Carolina Highway Patrolman named Mitch Altman.

A reminder that Mitch Altman was on the combined witness list in Alec Murdoch's trial. He was never called as a witness.

And then he shared photos of Sean's truck with him.

So basically, it sounds like there was some sort of informal investigation happening outside of the investigation.

Now who is Sean Connolly?

In April 2015, Patrick Wilson was charged with three counts of attempted murder in Hampton County for intentionally shooting in the direction of a man, a woman, and a child who were in a truck.

He was charged after deputies collected statements from witnesses.

One of those statements was Sean Connolly.

I'll have David read what Sean told deputies on April 17, 2015, a day before Patrick was formally charged.

Me and Patrick were riding around giving our crawfish traps time to sit.

When we turned, a white truck turned behind us.

Patrick said that it was the guy who owed him money, Timmy.

Patrick stopped and waved to stop him as he went around us.

But he did not.

Patrick followed him till he pulled over and they talked about the money.

And Timmy snapped off at him and was cursing and yelling, then pulled off.

And as he was leaving down the highway, Patrick grabbed my gun and shot at the sign right as he rode by it.

Timmy turned around and so did Patrick.

And Patrick hauled tail off.

Sean Connolly's statement helped seal Patrick's fate.

So the question is, what happened after that?

Were the two young men still friends after this?

Were they riding around together and hanging out less than three months later?

Was Patrick the person Sean would trust enough, call, and cry about being drunk and hitting

[Transcript] True Sunlight / MMP #89: The 'Godfather' of S.C.'s Prisons Gets Out Early and the Truth about the "Stephen Smith Theories"

and killing a human being?

Three counts of attempted murder.

These are not shoplifting charges.

After he was charged in the 14th Circuit, Patrick Wilson somehow procured the services of Beefert attorney Corey Fleming.

By the way, here's a quick update on old Corey and the 20 plus charges he faces in connection to his best friend, Ellick Murdoch's theft of the Gloria Satterfield settlement. There is no update.

According to the attorney general's office, there are no hearings scheduled in this case and there's been no change in status in terms of his suspended licenses to practice law in the states of South Carolina and Georgia.

Anyway, back to the matter at hand.

Somehow Corey Fleming ended up representing Patrick Wilson.

Flash forward to December 2015 and we have the quote, Sean Connolly did this story.

Sean Connolly, by the way, denies having anything to do with Steven's death.

Also, the speculation that Patrick was in the truck at the time came from the Hampton police officer who put all of this on the record and took it upon himself to get photos of Sean's truck.

Now let's talk about the truck.

We have pictures of this truck from social media.

The mirrors that seem to have been on the truck around that time look like they've been snapped off in a car wash.

But beyond that, let's talk about this inconvenient fact.

The story goes that Steven was walking home, right?

I want you to picture yourself as Steven right now.

Picture yourself walking along the yellow line in the center of Sandy Run Road, which is a long stretch of highway in rural South Carolina.

You are walking toward your father's house, okay?

Your father's house is up the road and to the left of you.

Got that?

You're on the yellow line in the middle of the road and your destination is some distance in front of you and to the left.

Now touch the right side of your forehead.

Put your hand right above the outer edge of your right eye.

That is where Steven's head wound was.

Now stop in the middle of this imaginary road on that imaginary yellow line.

But keep touching the right side of your forehead, okay?

In America, we drive on the right side of the road.

The car coming up behind you on your right is driving toward your destination.

It is facing in the same direction as you are.

If it hits you with its side view mirror, it hits the back of your head, okay?

The car coming toward you is on your left side.

It is facing you and you are facing the vehicle.

[Transcript] True Sunlight / MMP #89: The 'Godfather' of S.C.'s Prisons Gets Out Early and the Truth about the "Stephen Smith Theories"

Where is your hand again?

On the right side of your forehead, above your right eye.

Where is the side view mirror on this truck coming toward you, hitting you?

On the left side of your forehead, right?

In the Patrick Wilson-Sean Connolly theory, the theory in which Steven was hit by a side view mirror, explain how that works.

The driver in the vehicle coming toward you would have had to cross the yellow line, right?

And you would have been hit with the passenger side view mirror.

Now explain how a vehicle that's crossing the yellow line resulted in Steven lying unscathed but for his forehead in the middle of the road with loosely tied shoes and no mirrors or mirror parts near him.

And now consider this theory in conjunction with everything else we just told you, including this.

In 2016, the 14th Circuit Solicitor's Office reduced the attempted murder charges against Patrick Wilson to assault and battery.

In 2018, the 14th Circuit Solicitor's Office dismissed those charges altogether.

I've pointed this out to sources so many times over the past few years about the Wilson and Connolly theory.

As Mark Zuckerberg's character says in the movie, the social network to the Winklevide wins and their attorneys, you know, you don't really need a forensics team to get to the bottom of this.

If you guys were the inventor of Facebook, you'd have invented Facebook.

It is our opinion that if an unconnected and not wealthy and allegedly drunk teenager in Hampton County named Sean was responsible for killing Steven, then that teenager named Sean would have been charged with killing Steven.

But he wasn't.

Instead, his name appears to have been used as a red herring possibly.

I say appears to have been because I am not sled.

We are not investigators here.

We are sharing what we see from our perspective.

And this is what it looks like to us based on evidence we've seen, based on the interviews we've done over the years, based on the smaller picture, based on the bigger picture and based on the comparison of the two.

The Patrick Wilson-Sean Connolly theory relies entirely on a third-party confession that was never followed up on.

One private investigator's apparent hunch after seeing how freaked out a person might get when faced with the notion that he might be getting set up in the media, recklessly putting these two names out there again in the context of sleds, renewed efforts in solving this case.

And under the guise of credibility by interviewing someone who simply does not have authority in the matter and certainly isn't working with or for the Smith family as people have seen to assume.

It is a fact that Patrick and Sean's name, along with the Murdoch name, appear in the

[Transcript] True Sunlight / MMP #89: The 'Godfather' of S.C.'s Prisons Gets Out Early and the Truth about the "Stephen Smith Theories"

old case file.

The question is, what is included in the new case file?

The only people who know that answer, i.e. sled, aren't talking about it right now.

So keep that in mind as smart consumers of the media.

Now one more thing before we go.

It was reported by at least one outlet last week that a trial related to the boat crash cases, specifically those of Miley Altman and Morgan Dowdy, was postponed or cancelled.

That is incorrect.

Mark Tinsley is the attorney in those two cases, as well as Mallory Beach's case.

Miley's, Morgan's, Anthony Cook's, and Connor Cook's cases are all connected to the primary case, which is the wrongful death case brought by Mallory's family.

Miley's and Morgan's cases were erroneously put on the docket for some reason.

Their trials were never and are not yet scheduled.

If their cases go to trial, it would be after the Beach case goes to trial in August of this year.

Also, we wanted to mention that the auction of the Murdoch estate items that was held last month raised more than \$157,000.

The auction house will get about 40% of that, and the rest will go into Maggie Murdoch's estate, most of which, as you know, will go to the boat crash victims.

We have mixed feelings about the estate sale and the seemingly gruesome nature of it, and we question where are the more valuable items that would have been owned by Maggie went, because what was auction off seemed mostly made up of a lot of small items and little monetary value.

Those things aside, we're happy that at least some money is going to the victims.

The settlement reached with Maggie's estate and with Buster Murdoch doesn't mean that Buster is admitting to any fault in the case, but we are big believers in the idea that bad things can be prevented by one person in a chain of putting their foot down or asking Paul used Buster's license to buy alcohol that night.

Without that license, and without a store clerk who didn't abide by the store's policies on alcohol sales, there would have been no crash.

Mallory would likely be alive today, celebrating our 24th birthday this week.

So earlier, remember when I said this story and our mission is so much bigger than just Alec Murdoch.

Before we go, we want to tell you about what's ahead for the MMP team, and it's all good news.

Thanks to the MMP Premium members, our sponsors, and key people along the way, we have been able to partner with writers, researchers, and journalists to help us cover more ground.

Our mission to expose the truth wherever it leads, give voice to the victims, and get the story straight is expanding beyond South Carolina.

We will still report on the unsolved crimes that we've shared over the past few years.

We will still be keeping track of Corey, Russell, Alex, Carmen, Greg, Bowen, and all of the others we've talked about.

We will still be demanding justice for Stephen.

[Transcript] True Sunlight / MMP #89: The 'Godfather' of S.C.'s Prisons Gets Out Early and the Truth about the "Stephen Smith Theories"

We will still be following up and making noise in the Gerard Price case, and we will be asking a lot of questions of every public official involved.

But every week, we will point our investigative team and our Premium members beyond the Murdoch

case to stories of crime and corruption throughout the country.

So within the next month, the podcast will be changing, but we will still be here on the same feed week after week.

I promise you that.

We'll be looking at the history of how communities fall victim to power hungry people over generations.

We'll be teaching listeners how to prevent corruption using Sunshine Laws, FOIAs, and other methods.

Our network of journalists, researchers, writers, and creatives are ready to disinfect our communities.

Our team will spotlight local stories with international interest.

The MMP and COJ audiences are needed for this mission.

So stay tuned, stay pesky, and stay in the sunlight.

The Murdoch Murders podcast is created and hosted by me, Manny Matney, produced by my husband, David Moses, and Liz Farrell is our executive editor.

From Luna Shark Productions.